

AO 91 (Rev. 01/09) Criminal Complaint

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT

for the
Southern District of Ohio



United States of America
v.
Brandon Antonio Vanegas-Martinez

Case No.

2:21-mj-521

Defendant

CRIMINAL COMPLAINT

I, the complainant in this case, state that the following is true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

On or about the date of 08/02/2021 in the county of Franklin in the Southern District of Ohio, the defendant violated 21 U. S. C. § 846, an offense described as follows:

Title 21 USC Section 846 - Knowingly and intentionally attempting to possess with intent to distribute 100 grams or more of a mixture or substance containing a detectable amount of heroin, a Schedule II controlled substance.

This criminal complaint is based on these facts:
See Attached Affidavit

☒ Continued on the attached sheet.

Brandon J. Edwards

Complainant's signature

Brandon Edwards, Special Agent

Printed name and title

Sworn to before me and signed in my presence.

Date: 08/03/2021

City and state: Columbus, Ohio

Elizabeth Preston-Deavers

Judge's signature

Elizabeth Preston-Deavers, U.S. Magistrate Judge

Printed name and title

AFFIDAVIT

I, Brandon Edwards, being duly sworn, state:

INTRODUCTION

1. Your Affiant is a sworn Special Agent with the United States Department of Homeland Security (DHS), U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), Homeland Security Investigations (HSI). Your Affiant has been a Special Agent within DHS since September 2019. Your Affiant is assigned to the HSI Columbus office, where your Affiant has been involved with narcotics investigations. Prior to becoming a Special Agent with HSI, your Affiant was employed by the National Security Agency (NSA) as a Special Agent in Maryland, and as an employee with the Federal Bureau of Investigation in the Denver, Colorado Field Office.
2. Your Affiant has participated in and conducted numerous investigations of violations of various state and federal criminal laws, including the unlawful possession with intent to distribute controlled substances in violation of Title 21, United States Code. These investigations have resulted in arrests of individuals who have possessed with the intent to distribute controlled substances. These various investigations have also resulted in seizures of illegal drugs and proceeds from the distribution of those illegal drugs.
3. Your Affiant is familiar with the operation of illegal drug trafficking organizations in central Ohio.

PURPOSE OF AFFIDAVIT

4. I am participating in an investigation concerning an organized group of individuals including Brandon Antonio Vanegas-Martinez, Ricardo Castro-Aguilar and other unknown individuals, who are suspected of involvement in criminal offenses against the United States namely Title 21, United States Code Sections 846, conspiracy to distribute controlled substances, namely heroin.

5. The information set forth in this affidavit is based upon my knowledge, training, experience, and participation in investigations involving the smuggling, possession, distribution, and storage of narcotics and narcotics proceeds. This information is also based on the knowledge, training, experience, and investigations conducted by fellow law enforcement officers, which have reported to me either directly or indirectly. I believe this information to be true and reliable. I know it is a violation of Title 21, United States Code, Section 846 for any person to conspire to possess with the intent to distribute a controlled substance.
6. The information contained in this affidavit is based upon my personal participation in this investigation, that of other agents assisting in this investigation, my review of records, documents and other information relating to this investigation.

FACTS ESTABLISHING PROBABLE CAUSE

7. On June 7, 2021, investigators received information from a credible and reliable confidential source (hereafter referred to as CS#1) that an individual going by the name Antonio Venegas Martinez (later identified as Brandon Antonio Vanegas-Martinez) is responsible for the distribution of large amounts of narcotics in the Franklin County, Ohio area. CS#1 has previously provided information to investigators as part of a subsequent investigation which has resulted in numerous federal arrests and subsequent convictions as well as the seizure of kilogram quantities of narcotics in the Franklin County area. Specifically, during these previous investigations, investigators identified numerous "crews" that were sent to the Columbus, Ohio area for the sole purpose of distributing narcotics which areas sent to the United States from Mexico. These individuals were sent to Columbus by co-conspirators residing in Mexico. These separate crews usually consisted of numerous individuals who usually lived in the same residences. These individuals would each have separate jobs assigned to them. Some would distribute the narcotics, while others would be responsible for collecting the proceeds. Once investigators arrested the individuals in each of these "crews", the co-conspirators would then send a new crew to Columbus to continue the work of distributing the narcotics.

8. Specifically, as it relates to these previous “crews”, on November 21, 2017, investigators made one arrest and seized approximately 6.78 kilograms of heroin, \$117,813.00 in drug proceeds, a loaded handgun, scales, blenders, zip-lock bags, and a gym bag containing packaging materials and ledgers from “crew #1”. On December 13, 2017, from “crew #2” investigators made three arrests and seized approximately 2.5 kilograms of heroin, \$19,550.00 in drug proceeds, packaging materials and wire transfer receipts. On September 4, 2018, from “crew #3” investigators made one arrest and seized approximately 270 grams of cocaine, 450 grams of heroin, 60 grams of methamphetamines, and \$15,602.00 in drug proceeds. Lastly on July 13, 2018, from “crew #4”, investigators made two arrest and seized 5 kilograms of heroin, 5 handguns, \$26,883 in cash, ammunition, drug packaging materials, scales, drug ledgers, cellular phones, and wire transfer receipts.
9. In subsequent interviews with various defendants, the defendants all had similar stories. They were all recruited in Mexico for the sole purpose of delivering heroin to individuals in the Columbus, Ohio area. They would receive calls from their “boss” in Mexico on daily bases with instructions on where to go and who to deliver the heroin to. The heroin would be brought to the house by different persons each time. Usually 2-3 kilos of heroin would arrive during each delivery. The kilos would be wrapped in meat packing paper upon arrival. They would weigh the kilos upon arrival. These individuals would work in Columbus for a few months before being replaced with new workers. They usually had 6-7 customers that they would sell to. They would sell 1-8 ounces at a time to each of their customers. They would take money from the sale of the heroin to various people for them to wire it in \$6,000 - \$8,000 increments to Mexico. They got paid \$500-\$1500 per week depending upon how much they had sold during the week.
10. According to CS#1, Martinez is one of the members of the newest crew that had been sent to Columbus to distribute narcotics.
11. CS#1 was able to provide a photograph of Martinez to investigators as well as a description of the vehicle being used by Martinez to distribute narcotics. This vehicle was identified by CS#1 as being a red Chevrolet Equinox, bearing Ohio license plate, JJP7413. Through the use of various law enforcement databases, investigators were able to establish that the Equinox’s license plate was actually, JJP7431. This vehicle is

registered to Valencia Drywall Painting at 324 North Sylvan Avenue, Columbus, Ohio. Through the use of various law enforcement databases, investigators were unable to locate any record of a Valencia Drywall Painting at 324 North Sylvan Avenue, Columbus, Ohio.

12. On June 9, 2021, investigators located the red Chevrolet Equinox, bearing Ohio license plate JJP7431 parked in front of an apartment complex located in the area of 1504 Bay Club Circle, Columbus, Ohio.
13. On June 9, 2021, at approximately 10:20am, investigators observed a silver Toyota Scion bearing Ohio license plate JJP8671 arrive and park near the red Chevrolet Equinox, bearing Ohio license plate, JJP7431. Investigators observed the driver of the Scion, a Hispanic male (now believed to be Ricardo Castro-Aguilar), exit the driver's seat of the vehicle and walk up to the door of an apartment located on the second floor, later identified as apartment 1504. It appeared as though this individual used keys to unlock and enter the apartment. The Scion is registered to a Gernaro Hernandez Martinez at 143 South Oakley Avenue, Columbus, Ohio. No driver's license or any other identification data was found through checks the Ohio Bureau of Motor Vehicles on this individual. Through the use of law enforcement databases, investigators have been unable to locate any records of an individual named Gernaro Hernandez Martinez ever residing at 143 South Oakley Avenue, Columbus, Ohio or anywhere else in the state of Ohio.
14. At approximately 12:00pm, investigators observed the same Hispanic male (believed to be Aguilar) that arrived in the Scion and another Hispanic male, which matched the photograph of Martinez that was provided by CS#1, both exit apartment 1504 and enter the red Chevrolet Equinox, bearing Ohio license plate, JJP7431. They quickly departed the area. Both these individuals returned to the apartment at approximately 12:35pm.
15. On June 10, 2021, investigators conducted surveillance of the Chevrolet Equinox at 1504 Bay Club Circle, Columbus, Ohio. Investigators were able to observe an individual matching the photograph of Martinez, which was provided by CS#1, entering the driver's side of the Chevrolet Equinox. Investigators continued surveillance as Martinez drove the Equinox and was observed arriving and entering Arteta Multi-Services located at 4005 Sullivant Avenue, Columbus, Ohio. Arteta Multi-Services is a money-transfer business in Columbus, Ohio. Martinez was observed exiting this business with what appeared to be a

receipt on one hand. Investigators know it is common for individuals involved in the distribution of narcotics to wire proceeds from drug sales to other co-conspirators to other locations within the United States and foreign countries. It should be noted that on June 15, 2021, investigators obtained a State of Ohio search warrant allowing the installation of a GPS tracking unit to the red Chevrolet Equinox, bearing Ohio license plate, JJP7431.

16. While conducting surveillance between June 9, 2021, through June 16, 2021, investigators routinely observed both vehicles, the red Chevrolet Equinox, bearing Ohio license plate, JJP7431 and the Toyota Scion bearing Ohio license plate JJP8671 parked near the apartment located at 1504 Bay Club Circle, Columbus, Ohio. Based upon the training and experience of investigators, investigators believe that the two individuals driving these vehicles are both residing at 1504 Bay Club Circle, Columbus, Ohio. Investigators also believe that this individual driving the Toyota Scion is part of Martinez's "crew" and responsible for the distribution of narcotics in the Columbus, Ohio area. It should be noted that on June 21, 2021, investigators obtained a State of Ohio search warrant allowing the installation of a GPS tracking unit to the Toyota Scion bearing Ohio license plate JJP8671.
17. Using law enforcement databases and data from the two GPS tracking devices which have been installed on these two vehicles, investigators have located another residence that is being frequented by both these individuals. This residence is located at 1123 Pearway Lane, Columbus, Ohio. When these two individuals visit this location, they usually remain at his location for 5-10 minutes, with the longest stay being one hour eight minutes. During surveillance on this location, investigators have not observed any other individuals using this residence. Based upon the training and experience of investigators, investigators believe that this location may be a "stash house" being used by these individuals to store drugs and drug proceeds. Individuals involved with narcotics distribution routinely use "stash houses" so that law enforcement will not find narcotics if their residences are searched. Based upon surveillance and GPS data, it appears that these individuals moved items out of 1123 Pearway Lane, Columbus on July 2, 2021. Once Martinez and Aguilar were observed removing items including, large bags, from this residence, they immediately returned to 1504 Bay Club Circle, Columbus, Ohio.

18. In reviewing GPS data obtained from the tracking units installed on the Toyota Scion, the Chevrolet Equinox, and the Ford Fusion investigators have observed some vehicular activity consistent with known patterns of activity of individuals involved with the distribution of narcotics. Specifically, investigators noticed that these vehicles would make routine short trips to the same houses and motels. These visits to these locations were short in duration, usually round five minutes in time. The trips were just long enough to make contact with individuals, locate them and then sell the narcotics to these individuals. The vehicles would also make frequent trips to money wire transfer business. Investigators believe these individuals would make these trips to send drug proceeds back to co-conspirators in Mexico.
19. On July 15, 2021, at approximately 1:08pm, investigators conducted surveillance on the silver Toyota Scion bearing Ohio license plate JJP8671. Using the GPS tracking data, investigators located this vehicle while it was parked at a MoneyGram located at 3578 West Broad Street, Columbus, Ohio. At approximately 1:14pm, Martinez was observed entering this vehicle and he drove to a laundromat, SC Wash and Tan, located at 3090 West Broad Street, Columbus, Ohio. Martinez was observed taking an empty bag into the laundromat. At approximately 1:37pm, Martinez and Aguilar were observed exiting the laundromat, each carrying full bags. Both individuals placed these bags into the trunk of the Toyota Scion. Martinez then got into the driver's seat of the Scion. Aguilar was then observed walking to a bright blue Ford Fusion and entering the driver's side of the vehicle. Both vehicles departed the laundromat in tandem.
20. On July 20, 2021, investigators observed the silver Toyota Scion, the red Chevrolet Equinox, and the bright blue Ford Fusion, previously seen with Martinez on July 15, parked in front of 1504 Bay Club Circle, Columbus, Ohio. The Ford Fusion displayed Ohio temporary tag, M879792. This tag is registered to the same Gernaro Hernandez Martinez, 143 South Oakley Avenue, Columbus, Ohio, as the silver Toyota Scion.
21. On July 26, 2021, investigators obtained a State of Ohio tracking warrant for the blue Ford Fusion, bearing Ohio temporary tag, M879792. This warrant allows for the GPS monitoring of this vehicle for a period of forty-five (45) days following the successful install of the tracking device. The GPS tracking unit was successfully installed on the Ford Fusion on July 27, 2021.

22. On July 28, 2021, at approximately 6:00pm, investigators began conducting surveillance at 1504 Bay Club Circle, Columbus, Ohio. The silver Toyota Scion, the red Chevrolet Equinox, and a bright blue Ford Fusion were all parked in front of 1504 Bay Club Circle, Columbus, Ohio at the time this surveillance was established. At approximately 8:13pm, the blue Ford Fusion with Ohio temporary tag, M879792 departed 1504 Bay Club Circle. At approximately 8:27pm the Ford Fusion arrived at Hawthorne Suites Hotel located at 5505 Keim Circle, Columbus, Ohio. The vehicle was observed backing into a parking space in the hotel's parking lot. At approximately 8:31pm, three white males were observed standing near the Ford Fusion. One of these individuals entered the passenger side of the Ford Fusion and closed the door. At approximately 8:33pm, the white male exited the Ford Fusion, and all three white males entered a maroon Lincoln Towncar bearing Ohio temporary license M698235. This vehicle is registered to a Courtney Damrod. It was later learned that this individual had numerous active arrest warrants for drug possession and drug trafficking. The Ford Fusion departed the area immediate after the white males exited the vehicle. The Lincoln remained in the hotel parking lot with all three white males inside. Following this meeting, the Ford Fusion returned directly to 1504 Bay Club Circle, Columbus, Ohio. Based upon the training and experience of investigators, this meeting is consistent with a narcotics transaction.
23. Based upon surveillance and GPS tracking data, it now appears as though these individuals depart their residence at 1504 Bay Club Circle, Columbus, Ohio, and travel to meeting locations to sell the narcotics. They then usually drive directly back to their residence fooling the suspected transactions.
24. Based upon surveillance and GPS data, it does not appear that these individuals have a legitimate job in the Columbus, Ohio area in that they have never been observed traveling and remained at a place of employment.
25. On August 2, 2021, at approximately 10:30am, investigators noticed that the Ford Fusion had traveled to the Columbus International Airport. Investigators were able to respond to this location and observed that Ricardo Castro-Aguilar was at the ticketing gate for American Airlines. S/A Marvich was able to speak with a ticketing clerk and although she could not provide a name for this individual, she was able to advise that he was purchasing an airline ticket for travel to Dallas, Texas, tomorrow, August 3, 2021.

Investigators now believe that these individuals are in the process of leaving the city and being replaced by the next "crew."

26. On August 2, 2021, at approximately 3:30pm Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) Special Agents and Franklin County Sheriff's Deputies conducted a State of Ohio Search Warrant of 1504 Bay Club Circle, Columbus, Ohio.
27. While conducting the search warrant of the apartment, investigators found multiple cell phones, small plastic baggies typically used to transport narcotics, one handgun, multiple rounds of ammunition, a small amount of US currency, and two scales.
28. A Franklin County Sheriff's Office Narcotics Canine conducted a sniff test of the silver Toyota Scion parked in the front of apartment 1504. The canine alerted to narcotics within the Toyota Scion and a subsequent search resulted in the finding of approximately 527 grams of multiple powder like materials that field tested positive for Heroin. Approximately 1.533 kilograms of suspected Fentanyl (pending further lab testing) was also found in the Toyota Scion. A vacuum sealer was found in a box in the backseat of the Scion. These vacuum sealers are typically used in the transportation of narcotics.
29. Prior to the execution of the search warrant, investigators conducted surveillance of Martinez and Aguilar while they were driving the Red Chevy Equinox and the Blue Ford Fusion. Marked law enforcement officers conducted a traffic stop of each vehicle, and subsequent interviews were conducted in regard to each subject's role in the narcotics distribution organization.
30. HSI Special Agents Ryan Marvich and Brandon Edwards conducted a field interview, with the use of a Spanish translation line, of Brandon Antonio Vanegas-Martinez after he chose to waive his Miranda Rights. Martinez stated that he moved to Columbus, Ohio in February 2021 and began selling narcotics in May of that year. Martinez stated that he currently sells narcotics to two people and typically will sell approximately 6 to 8 grams at a time. He stated that he does not know his roommate's name, but calls him Heraldo, and that he deals narcotics to the same people.
31. HSI Special Agents Ryan Marvich and Brandon Edwards attempted to conduct a field interview of Ricardo Castro-Aguilar through the use of a Spanish translation line, but he invoked his right to an attorney before being questioned.

CONCLUSION

32. Based on the foregoing facts, your affiant believes that there is there is probable cause to believe that Brandon Antonio Vanegas-Martinez and Ricardo Castro-Aguilar both knowingly and intentionally attempted to possess with intent to distribute 100 grams or more of a mixture or substance containing a detectable amount of heroin, a Schedule II controlled substance in violation of Title 21 USC 846. Accordingly, your Affiant requests the issuance of a criminal complaint and arrest warrant for both Ricardo Castro-Aguilar and Brandon Antonio Vanegas-Martinez.



Special Agent Brandon Edwards
Homeland Security Investigations

Subscribed and sworn to before me this 3rd day of August 2021



Elizabeth Preston-Deavers
U.S. Magistrate Judge

